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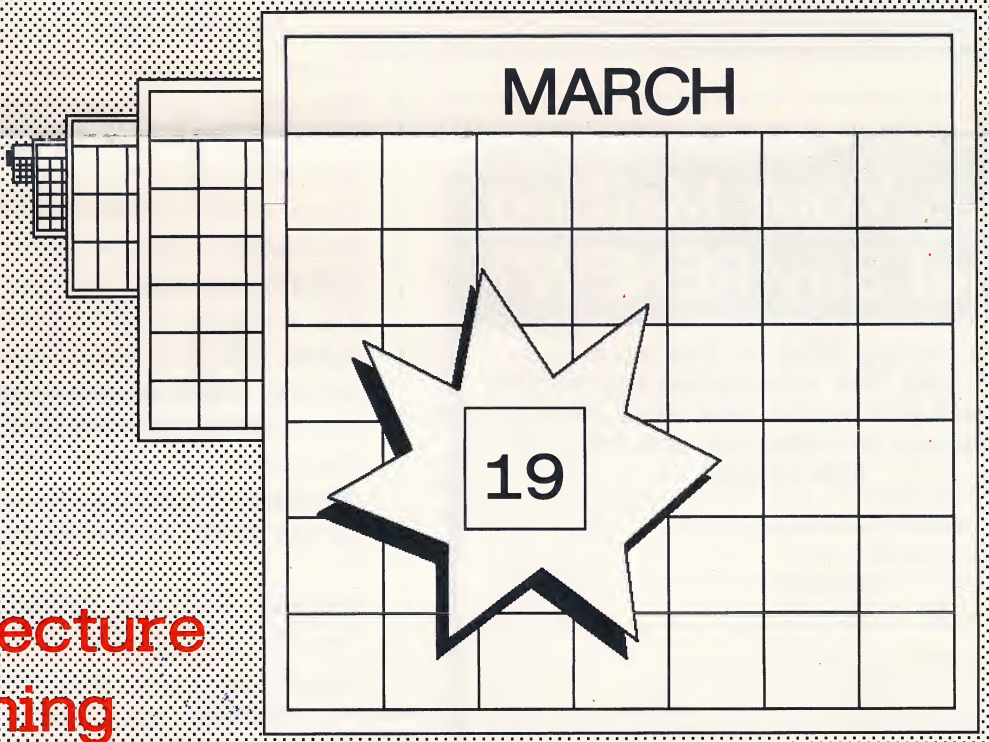

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Open Architecture Status Report

We recently interviewed Richard Lauer, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Pick...

Pragma: What exactly is Open Architecture?
Lauer: Open Architecture is essentially a new foundation upon which the Pick system is based. Over the last fifteen or so years, the Pick system has been added onto and patched and pieced together to such a degree that previous releases like R83 have come to be very difficult to maintain and add significant enhancements to. Open Architecture is, in some senses, a rewrite of all of that. It makes the underlying assembly code much easier to maintain and enhance.

Pragma: Is there documentation that describes what Open Architecture provides?
Lauer: We have some internal documents at this point. In its first release, which will essentially be available March 19th, there will be the normal kinds of documentation. Open Architecture will be completely compatible with the R83 version of the system, and there will be some new features. For example, a 1K frame size instead of 512 bytes, unlimited item size, and things of that nature. We'll actually start releasing it to the licensees the end of March. Then, over the balance of 1985, we'll make some other significant enhancements, such as the ability to use BASIC subroutines from dictionaries.

Pragma: Who has decided what's offered by Open Architecture?
Lauer: Primarily Dick Pick. Open Architecture is something that Dick is very much personally involved in. It's kind of a fruition of an awful lot of work for him, especially over the last couple of years. There is no question that Dick is fully in charge of what is going on.

Pragma: Has there been much influence on Open Architecture from outside sources?
Lauer: I'd like to think that we're sensitive

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to the needs of the marketplace and what our licensees and the end users are telling us. In terms of people from the outside participating in the development of Open Architecture, I'd say it's largely and almost exclusively been an internal project at Pick.

Pragma: If Open Architecture goes to licensees on March 19th, when will end users see a version from the licensees?
Lauer: It's somewhat dependent on the licensees, but I think it's reasonable to assume that Open Architecture will actually make its way to the streets sometime before the end of the year, and we hope it will be quite a bit before the end of the year. It's unreasonable to assume that it will be much before, say, June or July.

Pragma: Where's Open Architecture running now? Only internally at Pick?
Lauer: There are alpha copies that have been released to a couple of the licensees, but they are not formal releases. We're running it extensively at Pick, and have been, as far as all of our development efforts, for quite some time.

Pragma: Will Open Architecture also be available directly from Pick, in the same way that the IBM XT implementation is now?
Lauer: There will be a personal computer implementation of Open Architecture, yes.

Pragma: Also in March?
Lauer: Probably not. I would expect that it will be more in the June/July timeframe before you see it on the IBM XT.

Pragma: How are you expecting Open Architecture to be perceived and accepted by customers?
Lauer: We really hope that all of the licensees and, therefore, eventually all of their end users will move to Open Architecture. Since Open Architecture is fully compatible with R83, at first it may not even be obvious to end users that a system is running Open Architecture, other than some noticeable but not dramatic performance improvements, due largely to the 1K frame

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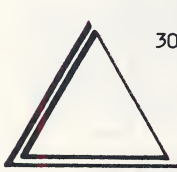

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size and things like that. What will happen later is that additional features that will be available will become so significant that Open Architecture will be hard to resist.

Pragma: Some licensees have added unique features for their implementations. Will those licensees have a problem trying to move those additional features over to Open Architecture?

Lauer: Not necessarily. In some cases, their enhancements will be intrinsic to Open Architecture, so they won't really need to do much. In other cases, yes, they will have to incorporate their changes into Open Architecture, but that shouldn't be a significant effort. For one, it's easier to make changes in Open Architecture, and two, we're still fundamentally dealing with the standard Pick instruction set, so assembly code they've written will still be highly transportable to Open Architecture. It just will take a little bit of effort to do so.

Pragma: If indeed Open Architecture is completely compatible with R83 applications, the only real end user benefit for converting to Open Architecture will initially be speed?

Lauer: Essentially that's true. On an ADDS Mentor, we're experiencing around a 30% performance improvement versus R83.

Pragma: What will future versions of Open Architecture offer?

Lauer: You'll see substantial enhancements with subsequent Open Architecture releases. In the long run, certain things that have been extremely difficult to do with the Pick system, particularly with regard to communication and networking, will become much less difficult projects to effect as far as implementation is concerned. Over the years to come, it'll become almost impractical to keep a system technologically current without Open Architecture. Not that existing systems won't still work and do just what they've always done. But I think Open Architecture is going to be an intrinsic part of really taking full advantage of new technology, particularly new communication functionality. ⊟

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